


# Artists of Abraham Lincoln portraits

Louis Kurz

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

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The Lincoln  
Lithographic Stone



## The Lincoln Lithographic Stone

THE LINCOLN lithographic stone exhibited in our lobby is a rare antique procured at auction several years ago. An early Chicago artist, Louis Kurz, rendered the portrait around 1880.

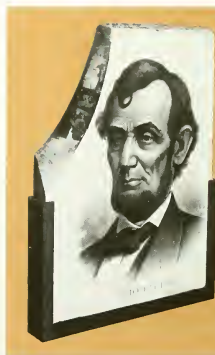
On the opposite side of the stone is still another portrait, one of George Washington, the image showing marked deterioration through age and careless storing. A comparison of the two subjects reveals the great skill and patience exercised in the restoration of the Lincoln head. One of the proofs has been framed and hangs on the wall of the conference room.

### DESCRIPTION OF STONE LITHOGRAPHY

It may be opportune to briefly describe here the process of early lithography. The first step in the preparation of the Bavarian limestone, most suited for lithography because of its fine grained texture, is the grinding of it to a flat and textured surface known as "graining." This provides an acceptable surface for the lithographic artist's crayon or pen and also improves water receptivity so essential to the process.

After the stone has been ground and otherwise prepared, it is ready for the creation of the printed image by the lithographic artist. He

*Image on stone is  
drawn reading wrong.*



draws directly upon the stone with special ink-receptive crayons and pencils, or with tusche to achieve painting technique.

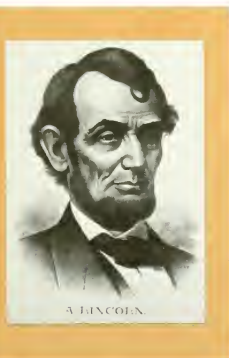
Upon completion of the printing image (*the drawing*), the stone is chemically treated to improve the ink-repellance and water-receptivity (hydrophilic) of the *non-image* areas and, separately, to improve the ink receptivity and water-repellance (hydrophobic) of the *image areas*. The first treatment is traditionally known as "etching," and the second as "rolling up." The word etching is inexact and the latest technical literature prefers the term desensitizing. Desensitizing is done by brushing a chemical solution on the stone. "Rolling up" is done by applying a special greasy ink to the image on the stone's surface with a roller.

The finished stone is then proofed on a flat bed press and thereafter either retouched or completely reworked. Finally, impressions are pulled on paper that has been dampened to achieve maximum printing ink affinity.

Today stone lithography is no longer used for commercial purposes but considered an important medium of creative art.

#### CONTRAST OF THE OLD AND THE NEW

Modern offset lithography and stone lithography are both a form of planographic printing based on the fundamental principle that grease and water do not mix. But from that point on,



*Final print from stone  
reads right.*

the preparation of the image carrier and the printing thereof, are radically different. In modern offset lithography the image is created photographically and the paper is not printed directly from the press plate but from a rubber offset blanket (*transfer cylinder*).

Another marked difference between stone and offset lithography is the type of press used in printing. Stones must necessarily be placed on a flat bed press, the output of which is slow and laborious. In modern offset lithography the image carrier is a light weight metal plate wrapped around a cylinder, making possible the rotary method of printing for fast and economical production.

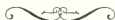
#### NOTES

Inventor of lithography was  
Alois Senefelder of Bavaria in 1789.

Source of term "*lithograph*";

"*Litho*" means stone; "*graph*" means  
writing. Hence the word "*lithograph*."

Size of stone 28x38 in.; weight 319 lbs.

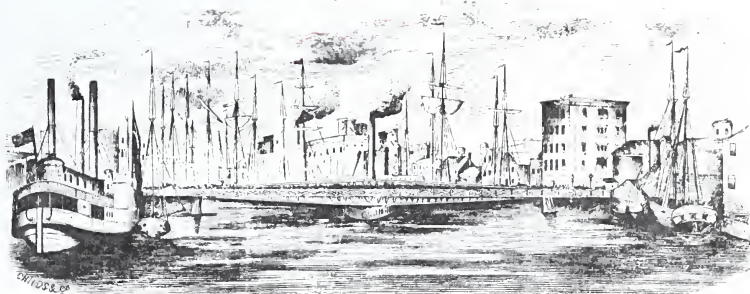


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May 30, 1984

Mark E. Nelly, Jr., Director  
 The Louis A Warren Lincoln Library  
 and Museum  
 1300 South Clinton Street  
 P.O. Box 1110  
 Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801

Dear Mr. Neely,

I am not sure that the information I have will help you establish the publication priorities of the lithograph Mr. Lincoln. Residence and Horse..., but here is what I found out. The Chicago Historical Society owns one lithograph by Kurz and two by Shober. The Kurz is the same size as the one you mention while the Shober is slightly larger than the measurements you gave me--20 1/2 x 15 1/2 inches. On page 35 of America on Stone, Peters says that the only difference between the two prints is the use of "&" and "and" in the titles. Just to confuse matters, all three of the CHS prints use "and" in the title.

In an article on Kurz published in the Spring 1982 issue of IMPRINT, Thomas Beckman states that during Kurz's early years in Chicago he "not only operated independently, as he had following the alliance with Lane, but also worked for other lithographers and publishers". Perhaps this sheds some light on a possible tie in with Shober.

I am sorry I could not be of more help in this matter.

Sincerely,

Maureen O'Brien Will  
 Maureen O'Brien Will  
 Assistant Curator  
 Prints & Photographs



# CIVIL WAR TIMES

JANUARY 1986 \$2.50

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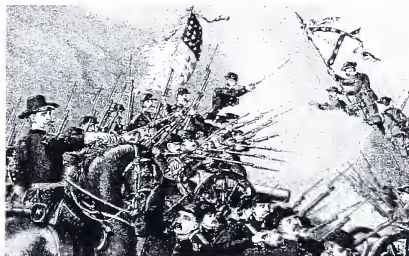
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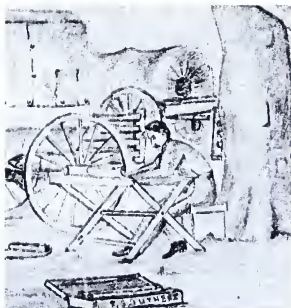
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## OUR COVER

A Union cavalry bugler in the  
Army of the Potomac calls troops  
to horse. A photograph from a  
Civil War reenactment in Virginia,  
by Rosanne Berkenstock.

## ON THE BACK

A detail from a Louis Kurz litho-  
graph depicting the November  
1863 Battle of Fort Sanders at  
Knoxville, Tennessee. The story  
of the man who created this,  
and many other familiar war  
scenes, begins on page 26. Art  
from the CWTI Collection.



# Art For The Parlors Of America

By Harold Holzer

**T**he year was 1865. The Civil War was over, President Abraham Lincoln had been murdered, and Illinois' best-known lithographer, Chicagoan Louis Kurz, had conceived an inspired idea for a popular print.

Kurz' competitors in New York City, Boston, Massachusetts, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, were already flooding the market with Lincoln prints. Most of these, however, were straightforward memorial portraits or assassination and deathbed scenes. The thirty-year-old, Austrian-born Kurz had quite a different approach in mind.

He would combine two of the most traditional and identifiable symbols in art—the hero's home and the hero's horse—to create a novel portrayal of a triumphal return to Springfield, Illinois, by the martyr who would never return again.

Kurz titled his effort *Mr. Lincoln. Residence and Horse, in Springfield, Illinois, as they appeared on his return at the close of the Campaign with Senator Douglas*. The large, black-and-white lithograph portrayed a bearded Lincoln, hat in hand, arriving on horseback before his two-story house, waving to a small but enthusiastic-looking crowd of neighbors and well-wishers.

Judging alone from the number of original prints that survive and the contemporary re-issues it in-

spired, Kurz' lithograph proved a considerable success in its day. Decades later, when he wrote his famous book on lithography, *America on Stone*, the great collector, Harry T. Peters, continued to call attention to the picture. To Peters the print seemed to express "the essentially American quality" of all lithography. It was "superlatively American," raved Peters, much like Lincoln himself: "crude, simple, enterprising, democratic, and honest."

What Peters overlooked was that, like so many other Kurz efforts, spirited though it seemed, it was anything but "honest." Quite the contrary: Kurz' scene was posterously inaccurate.

For one thing, it showed Lincoln as the bearded candidate, when, in fact, he had not grown his famous whiskers until *after* his election to

EVERYONE HAS  
SEEN A LOUIS  
KURZ CIVIL WAR  
BATTLE SCENE—  
NOT EVERYONE  
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GENIUS WHO  
CREATED THEM



the presidency.

Worse, it depicted a "return" home from campaigning that suggested—wholly without foundation—that Lincoln had stumped on his own behalf in 1860. Actually, Lincoln did not believe presidential candidates should campaign, and had never left his hometown between his nomination and election. He could not have returned to his home "at the close of the campaign," because he never departed

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in the first place.

Such "details" probably did not much concern Louis Kurz. No doubt he felt it would not do to portray a clean-shaven Lincoln in the year 1865, when audiences were buying so many pictures of the more familiar, bewhiskered martyr. And whether or not Lincoln had really inspired a welcome-home demonstration after the 1860 campaign, most likely did not seem to Kurz as meaningful as the

JANUARY 1986

heartbreaking (and marketable) truth that Lincoln's tragic death now meant he would never again lay eyes on the only home he ever owned. Why not, then, haul out the symbol for a popular print?

For Louis Kurz, turning broad, sentimental notions into attractive, if somewhat stilted tableaux, had become a way of professional life.

In thirty years of productive work, both in Chicago and Milwau-

*The Civil War as Kurz had Americans see it. This scene of the November 1863 Battle of Fort Sanders at Knoxville, Tennessee, almost wholly inaccurate, does include one detail veterans would agree upon. There was telegraph wire strung in front of Fort Sanders to impede the Confederate advance.*







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## Chromolithographs Were The Civil War . . . Frozen Images Of Neat Lines Of Blue And Gray . . .



**As Kurz imagined the finish of the December 1864 Battle of Nashville, Tennessee. Author Holzer notes the symbolism in this scene. A Southerner supporting his wounded comrade raises a white cloth in surrender, indicating Confederate defeat at Nashville.**

kee, Wisconsin, this one-time mural painter became, in a sense, the muralist of the lithographic stone, bringing static but sweeping vistas of war and peace down to a size Americans could display in their parlors—"fancy prints of the most elaborate workmanship," according to a contemporary observer. More accurately, Louis Kurz became, in the words of a modern critic, the "merchant of the ordinary."

But of all his efforts, Louis Kurz—together with his last partner, Alexander Allison—became 28

and remains best-known for three dozen brilliantly colored chromolithographs issued at intervals during the 1880s and 1890s, depicting the battles and skirmishes of the Civil War. It was as ambitious an art portfolio of the conflict as any 19th-century publisher ever issued to commemorate the event.

Handsome and detailed—for prints, that is, though perhaps not for real battles—the scenes passed for true reconstructions of major events for a generation bred on unillustrated war histories, maps

that showed sites but not sights, and volumes of so-called battlefield photographs that never really caught the action, only its aftermath. Kurz offered something new. Nonetheless, his efforts were also unimaginative in concept and competition, hopelessly repetitive in design, and rather stagnant in execution—at least to the modern eye.

Civil War historians can find a plethora of errors in these battle scenes. But there is no disputing their one-time popularity, or the marketing genius behind the plan that called for their publication on dates corresponding roughly to the twentieth or twenty-fifth anniversaries of each of the battles they

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portrayed.

For audiences distanced by years from the horrors and heroism of the action, Kurz & Allison's battlefield chromolithographs were the Civil War: romanticized, small-scale frozen images of neat lines of blue and gray squaring off in artistic patterns beneath billows of cumulus-like smoke and gently buffeted flags.

It took several generations more to put right the misinformation Kurz' prints promulgated. But before his viewpoint disappears altogether, a reappraisal of Kurz himself and his unique artistic vision seems required. As important as it seems to correct Kurz' errors, is the need to understand and appreciate his impact during his career—a time when printmakers illustrated American parlors and American life. What Louis Kurz published, Americans purchased and displayed.

Ludovicus Ferdinandus Josephus Kurz von Goldenstein—he did not shorten his name until he established himself as an American artist—was born in Salzburg, Austria on November 23, 1835. Eleven years later his father emigrated alone to America, settling in Milwaukee, where he began operating a tavern and opened the city's first German-language theater. Not until twenty more months passed did the elder Kurz send for his son. Louis was twelve when he arrived, a German-speaking newcomer to the newest state in the Union.

No one knows for sure what, if any, formal art training Louis Kurz received, in Europe or America. Somehow, by the time he was sixteen, he was painting scenery for his father's theater. He even did some acting there, according to one source, and spent time working for *The Banner*, a local German newspaper. Kurz was unquestionably artistic as a youth; he was apparently also tough. Records show that he even got himself arrested at one point for assaulting a policeman, though the charge was later dismissed for lack of evidence.

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**K**urz began a lifelong flirtation with the city of Chicago in 1853, when his father moved him there. Louis soon listed himself as a "scenic artist." Art historian Thomas Beckman logically asserts that Kurz almost certainly received his earliest training as a lithographer at this point in his life. There were no lithographers at all in Milwaukee until the year Kurz left,



***Louis Kurz in his prime. At the height of his artistic and commercial powers, the lithographer located himself in Chicago, even then the United States' second largest city.***

while Chicago counted among its printmakers the German-born Edward Mendel. It is likely that it was Mendel who gave Kurz his first training in lithographic art.

By late 1856, however, Kurz was back in Milwaukee, a "painter and lithographer," according to surviving city directories. Later directories show him listing himself, respectively, as "portrait and landscape painter," then as "artist." But if these modifications reflected a steady progress toward a career as a self-supporting artist, that ascendancy halted abruptly by 1860, when Kurz listed himself as a house and sign painter. He had probably found the life of an artist aesthetically stimulating but finan-

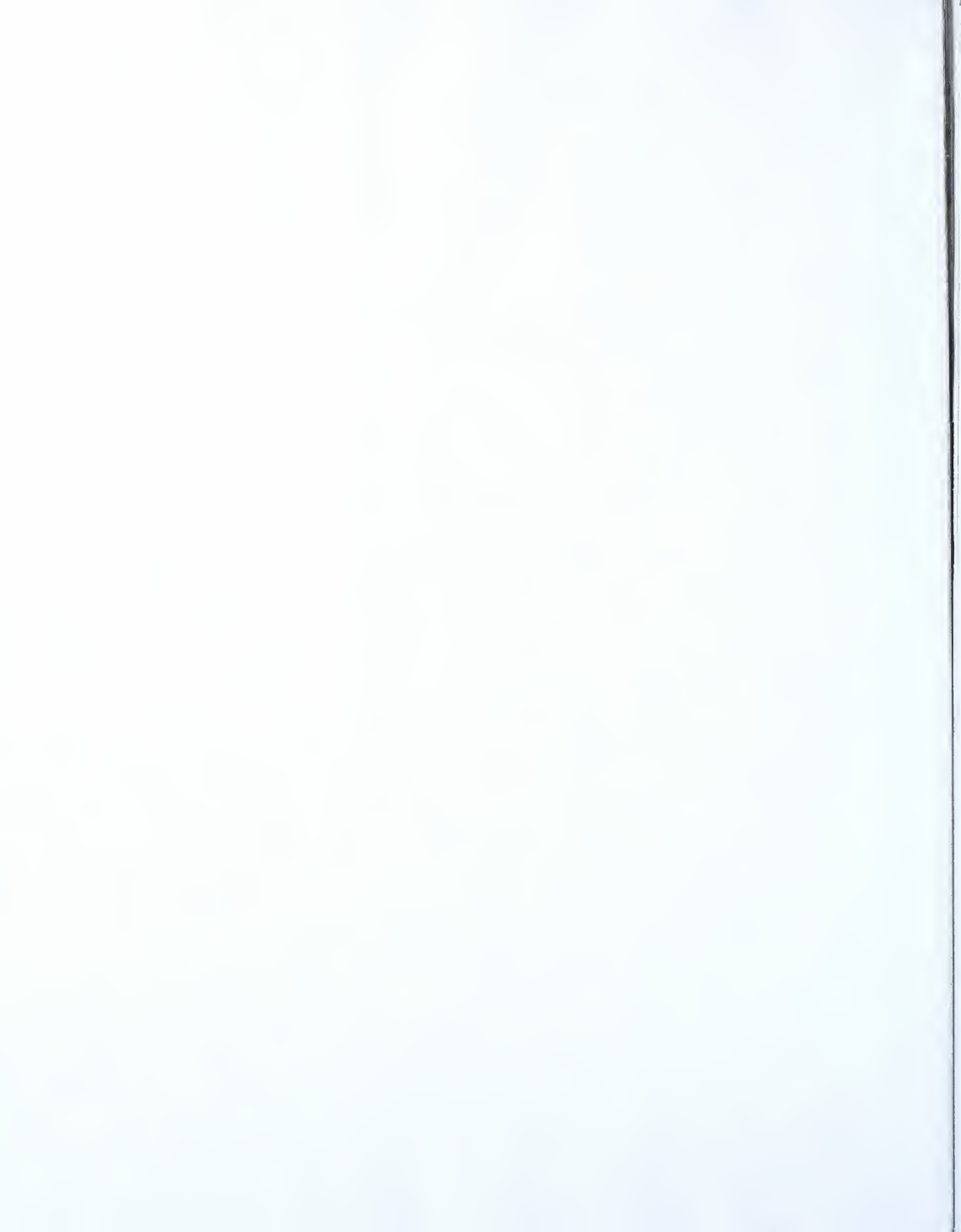
cially unrewarding. Kurz married in 1857 and by 1861 two of his ten children had been born. That year, Louis Kurz became a fulltime, professional lithographer. Earlier Kurz designs had been lithographed and engraved by others, but by the outbreak of the Civil War, Kurz was in business for himself.

That year he joined Milwaukee's best-known printmaker, Henry Seifert, to form Kurz & Seifert (in which the junior partner was unaccountably billed first). A few months later a local critic acknowledged the "artistic execution" of the firm's works. Their print portrait of opera star Inez Fabbrini was praised as "equal to anything issued from the house of Currier & Ives of New York." With allowance for exaggeration, there was no doubt: Louis Kurz was successfully launched as a printmaker.

The firm also issued several Wisconsin town views, "drawn after nature by L. Kurz," eight of which have so far been discovered, all published in 1861 and 1862. There were scenes of Fond du Lac, Waukesha, and Janesville among them, all drawn from low-horizon vantage points—not quite as breathtaking as so-called bird's-eye views, but original and effective.

Some of these early Kurz scenes included small groupings of soldiers, but aside from that visual acknowledgement of the war, there is no evidence that Louis Kurz ever had anything to do with the fighting between North and South beyond issuing an occasional "war-time" print—an illustration for a book of patriotic marches or a scene of a Union encampment in Milwaukee.

But an auction catalog offering Kurz & Allison Civil War battle chromolithographs asserted: "When the Civil War broke out, President Lincoln asked Kurz to visit the scenes of action and make a record of the fighting." There is not a word of truth in that frequently-advanced claim, nor in the Kurz obituary that claimed he was a personal friend of Lincoln's and a







member of the 1st Wisconsin Sharpshooters (a company writer Beckman says did not even exist). Such myths may have evolved from the marketing effort Kurz no doubt undertook to sell his battle scenes twenty years later. But they were all false.

Somehow, the twenty-six-year-old printmaker managed to stay out of the war and continue publishing lithographs, even though he had become an American citizen in 1856. By 1862, Kurz dissolved his partnership with Seifert, publishing for a while under the imprint of L. Kurz & Co., and then forming a new partnership with a one-time tailor named Henry Boebel, who probably provided an infusion of capital, then conveniently joined the army himself and left town. With Boebel's money behind him, however, Kurz was able to enlarge his scope. He published excellent group scenes, including several tableaux of the city's hook and ladder fire companies. Using colors with increasing sophistication, Kurz now printed in tints of blue, yellow and red. The Boebel partnership, however, lasted only until 1863. That year Kurz joined with painter F.M. Lane.

Kurz, Lane & Co. issued one portrait of Thomas Paine. And while

**Portraits of First Families, produced by Kurz. Left to right: The Harrison Family (Mrs. Harrison, son Russell, President Harrison, and sister-in-law Mrs. Mary McKee), The Lincoln Family (Abraham, Tad, Willie, Robert, and Mary), and The Grant Family (U.S. Grant, Jr., daughter Nellie, sons Fred and Jesse, daughters-in-law and grandchildren, President Grant, and Julia Grant). All are static poses and (as with Julia Grant's crossed eyes) accentuate less comely features.**

Milwaukee Germans had a proven affinity for that Revolutionary War-era hero, the choice of Paine as a subject may have been an early effort by Kurz to enlarge his audience beyond the boundaries of Milwaukee. His intriguing group work, meanwhile, continued. Independently, he published a wonderfully detailed 1863 scene of the *Madison Turnverein*, (a gymnastic group he helped found) along with a portrait of more than 100 members of the *Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway Co.*, a large-format print that included a beautifully drawn locomotive.

Kurz was getting better at his craft. But he also seemed hopelessly mired in the constraints of the local marketplace. In 1864, Kurz made his major move back to Chicago. For a while there, he continued to publish independently, freelanced for other publishers, and even created and then quickly disbanded another partnership. His work during this period—includ-

ing a pictorial tribute to the 1864 Democratic National Presidential Platform, a fine Chicago view entitled *Metropolis of the Northwest*, as well as his famous, folksy equestrian Lincoln at home—reveal a growing maturity and increasing mastery of the nuances of his art.

Kurz also returned to scenery painting, producing some designs for McVicker's Theatre and Crosby's Opera House. It was his contract with Crosby's that proved particularly important, because it introduced him to the Scandinavian-born interior designers Otto Jevne and Peter Almini. Just after Lincoln's assassination in 1865, the trio founded the Chicago Lithographing Company, where they were joined by Otto Knirsch, veteran of both the Mendel and Currier & Ives firms, and by Edward Carqueville, a one-time associate of printmaker Charles Shober. For the next six years, this firm stood ready, as they boasted in a period advertisement, "to execute every

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description of lithography, such as landscapes, views of buildings, postcards, showcards, maps, bill and letter heads, cards, bonds, checks, drafts, bills of lading, views of towns, cities, etc. etc."

**I**t was in this last category that the company would score its greatest triumph, creating for a post-war audience eager to rebuild ties to their hometowns a series of superb scenes for *Chicago Illustrated*. The plan was "to publish in Monthly Parts, an illustrated history . . . of the more important and striking evidences of the City's improvement and enterprise." The works would be "executed from Original Drawings," and the prospectus assured customers that the Kurz firm, "employed . . . expressly for this Work . . . stands equal to that of any of the profession in this country." In short, its publishers promised, the prints would, "in point of artistic execution, equal any publication of the kind ever made in the United States."

Each portfolio, at a price of \$1.50, would include four 8½ x 12 Kurz prints of "public buildings, churches" and "important thoroughfares," plus an accompanying text by a leading Chicago journal-

ist, James Sheahan. The series proved everything it was advertised to be—up to a point. By January 1867, after only half of the promised portfolio had appeared, publication was suspended. The project was probably losing money.

Critics have still long considered the incomplete set a superb effort that transcended the local booster ethic typically attached to city and town views. One of Chicago's great historians, Paul M. Angle, thought these works "remarkable achievements . . . the best sources for the physical appearance of the city that the Great Fire destroyed in 1871." Dismissing their narrative component as inconsequential, he attributed their enduring value solely to "Jevne & Almini's choice of a capable artist and lithographer"—Louis Kurz.

The rest of the Chicago Lithographing Company's output was far less remarkable—with the possible exception of one ambitious view of the 1869 Vatican Ecumenical Council portraying no fewer than 725 church leaders. For the most part, the creative zenith of Kurz' first Chicago period had come and gone with the rich detail of *Chicago Illustrated*. It was one of the efforts from that portfolio, a view of an 1866 fire on Lake

Street, that presaged the dramatic end to Kurz' initial commercial relationship with that city. A few years later, the "Great Fire" destroyed Kurz' business and left his lithography career in ruins. He had no choice but to return to the only other business location he had known, Milwaukee.

There Kurz founded with local photographer Hugo Brioch a new firm he named the American Oleographic Company—an "oleo" being a German-style chromolithograph, printed in thick, dark inks and heavily coated with varnish. The *Milwaukee Journal* reported that Kurz' sole ambition then was to publish "chromos a la Prang." But the oleographic style and method were alien to what noted artist Louis Prang was doing in Boston, and Kurz did not begin to approach the critical success enjoyed by his eastern rival. Kurz would remain in Milwaukee for the next six years, but his efforts there have been termed "mediocre" and "low level" by no less an authority than the acknowledged historian of chromolithography, Peter Marzio.

Marzio was correct. Kurz' original works during this period of his career—Canadian and Milwaukee scenes and something called *Centennial Mirror*, among others—





battlefield tableaux, with their ever-present puffs of red and white smoke, their almost too-neat columns of soldiers, their uncluttered vistas, and their statistic-rich captions, enumerating the dead and wounded of each battle they portrayed. Appearing as they did to commemorate the anniversaries of the key struggles of the war, they found enormous audiences—even though they were published toward the end of America's great passion for print portraits. Judging alone by the number of surviving copies from the series, Kurz & Allison's romantic, ordered, conspic-

*The master and friends, long after his heyday: wooly-bearded Louis Kurz, Mrs. Laura Stack, and Louis Kurz, Jr. Photographed here, shortly before his death in 1921 he has seen the camera largely replace chromolithography as a means of preserving the historical record.*

were sloppily designed and unimaginatively conceived. Kurz fared far better reproducing original art works, another Oleographic Company specialty. They were not the American works Prang was copying and churning out to such acclaim, but works from England and the Continent, selected by a cadre of agents and brought back to Milwaukee for copying. Kurz even displayed the originals in a part of his office set aside as a gallery; and when this part of the business grew so large it could not be housed any longer, Kurz moved it to an independent headquarters, in effect opening Milwaukee's very first art gallery. There was no question but that the public, at least, loved Kurz' Milwaukee productions. "Mediocre" or not, the firm soon employed twenty-one pressmen, and grew prosperous enough eventually to take in two of Kurz' sons and one of his partner's.

Eventually, however, Brioch decided to return to photography, and Kurz took advantage of the development to relocate again—back to Chicago, where he arrived in 1878 to lay new claim to an audience he had conquered before the fire seven years earlier.

Two years later, in 1880, Louis

Kurz formed the final and most famous business partnership of his career, the alliance with Alexander M. Allison. As critic Harry Twyford Peters would write, their work reflected the true spirit of the art—created by "those who knew what the American people wanted, who liked it themselves, and who expressed it quickly and adequately." If, in the process, Louis Kurz came to sacrifice some of his zealous attention to accessorizing, his passion for detail, and his quest for accuracy in pictorial reportage, the decided shift in taste and style only produced new and more loyal audiences for the veteran lithographer. Kurz & Allison would remain in business for decades, with Kurz himself active in the firm into the 20th century.

The firm's own stated goal was "originating and placing in the market artistic and fancy prints of the most elaborate workmanship." The results were hundreds of vivid, colorful scenes of disasters and triumphs, portraits and scenes, politicals and theatricals—and, of course, the immortal thirty-six Civil War commemoratives issued in the 1880s and 1890s.

Kurz & Allison's greatest fame came from these well-known

ously bloodless interpretations of the American Civil War found widespread approval from the national picture audience in the 1880s and '90s.

In evaluating all three dozen pictures as a unified pictorial history of the war, it is easy to find and report errors of fact and perspective, certainly when judging the efforts alongside the modern history of troop movements during those battles. But in the absence of such rich archival material, Kurz & Allison's interpretations were astonishing, both artistically and historically.

In his 1889 work, *Battle of Pea Ridge*, for example, Kurz made an attempt to list all the units involved, in a richly detailed caption. As for the scene itself, Kurz drew an impressively thick line of blue against an eerie backdrop of barren trees. *Battle of Nashville*, issued in 1891, was one of the most placid of the series, depicting a quiet, sandy Tennessee knoll littered with dead and wounded Rebels, from whose distance,







Kurz' renderings of, above, the November 1864 Battle of Franklin, Tennessee, and, below, the September 1862 Battle of Antietam, Maryland. The Antietam scene shows that battle's action at the Burnside Bridge. The skewed landscape of the view of the fighting at Franklin does show one germane feature of the battle; Union troops withdrawing across a lone, rickety bridge to the safety of Federal lines at Nashville.



CW7I Collection





rather significantly, colored troops emerge to join the fight. One soldier carrying a small white flag as he cradles a wounded officer, serves to re-emphasize the Confederates' defeat there. The point, as the caption indicates, was to portray a "whole army routed," and the scene managed successfully to convey that impression. The 1890 *Capture of Fort Fisher* was also appealing, showing an attack against Rebel barricades from the vantage point of the attackers. The print is

in 1889, is hopelessly undramatic and stilted, portraying a charge toward an impregnable-looking summit that manages to look as uninteresting as it appeared unconquerable. And *The Battle of Gettysburg*, based on a painting by Kurz himself, attempted without much success to capsule a three-day engagement into a single, barely-identifiable highlight. The result is poorly designed confusion, with no clear sense of where and when the scene is unfolding.

a broad audience for his oversimplification. Just as he had poured a passion for minute detail into his *Chicago Illustrated* project—and failed with it commercially—so had he parlayed the muralist's eye for the broad-stroke of pictorial history into a less critically pleasing but overwhelmingly popular effort.

Even acknowledging that Kurz' style was unique among American lithographers, critics complain that he spent most of his later career



**Chubby and charming nude bathers, the comic nadir of Kurz' work.** Kurz printed statistical information beneath each of his Civil War prints. He, fortunately, provided nothing similar for his swimming nymphs.

devoid of much action, but the sight of the Confederates waiting almost helplessly for the assault behind their dirt barricades manages to suggest the futility of their defense.

Certainly there were failures among the three dozen efforts. *Battle of Lookout Mountain*, issued

To chromolithography specialist Marzio, all the Kurz & Allison Civil War battle scenes were "characterized by mural-like rigidity, a simplicity in drawing style, and poorly delineated details." But Kurz, the old mural painter who had once designed frescoes for the walls of Milwaukee taverns, had indeed found

playing it safe artistically with non-committal approaches to universal subjects. There is some truth to this. The firm's Revolutionary War scenes looked very much like the Civil War designs, except that General George Washington appeared where Union Major General George G. Meade, among others, had been placed in the 1860s views. An especially poor attempt to create similar interest for the War of 1812 with scenes of future Presidents

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Andrew Jackson and Benjamin Harrison triumphing in the Battles of New Orleans and Tippecanoe were sloppily designed and suffered from dreadful portraiture. In fairness, some of the firm's other colored chromolithographs—including a handsome, large-format portrait of Lincoln based on an infrequently adapted 1861 photograph, and an impressive tableau of the Johnstown (Pennsylvania) Flood—were handsome and appealing.

**M**ost of Kurz's later efforts were not. But there is little question that they answered a sustaining need among American audiences for simple, straightforward, uncomplicated display pieces suitable for the parlor wall of the family home. The Kurz and Allison "Art Studio," as it billed itself occasionally, produced one such series in the 1870s and 1880s, a succession of First Family portrayals stressing the unprovable, unlikely, but reassuring domestic harmony of several presidential families. Thus the Lincolns were shown reading scripture in a realistically-styled (but inaccurate) portrayal in which Mary Lincoln loomed larger than her husband, and youngest son Tad stood taller than his older brother Willie. An 1885 scene of the Ulysses S. Grants' extended family circle seemed to emphasize the reassuring mutual support of the large group, an emphasis immediately defeated by the depiction of most of the group's female members as hopelessly cross-eyed (an affliction for which Mrs. Grant was particularly noted). A Garfield family, Harrison family, and even a McKinley family scene followed, all based on the two stock designs of the earlier pictures: the up-close, starkness of the Lincoln group or the more formal, more distant grouping first used for the Grants. And to emphasize the continuity of political family as sustenance for the personal family, cameo portraits or

busts of the martyred Lincoln made repeated appearances in the depictions of succeeding presidents and their wives and children.

Kurz' long career as a lithographer might have ended on this note of traditionalism had not the printmaker made one of his final series so discordant—and so unavoidably appealing. In the mid-1880s, from the presses of the same "Art Publisher" that was busily churning out battle scenes and First Family tableaux, came a series of nude bather scenes that were totally alien to Kurz' own style, the publishing ethic of the firm, and the sensibilities of the American audience.

There is no explaining the sudden, dramatic, and daring shift—unless Kurz had found an untapped audience likely to display the kind of pictures that were still considered improper for the parlor—But it is impossible not to find pleasure in these "Female bathers, numbers one, two, three and four," that art historian Marzio has described as "a bevy of bovine nymphs, naked amazons . . . thighs and buttocks like tree trunks, bellies like watermelons, and faces with mannequin expressions" in seductive poses around forest-rimmed pools, neatly arranged almost in battlefield order, with an obvious difference—the absence of uniforms. Ordinarily, nudity was taboo, Marzio has acknowledged, in the "democratic Art" of chromolithography. But Kurz had undoubtedly found a potential new audience. Throughout his career, in whatever city he operated, in whatever project he undertook, the business of art had been his principal guidepost, and few career lithographers had mastered his marketplace as cleverly and for so long as Louis Kurz.

Kurz' lithographic output continued through the late 1890s, with large-format portraits of Negro educator Booker T. Washington and Admiral George Dewey, among others, highlighting the company's final phase of productivity.

The bearded old artist, who had brought such vivid illumination to the struggles between North and South, to the emergence of America's second city, and to the visages of the leading personalities of three generations, lived on until 1921. By the time of his death at age eighty-five, however, America had long lost her taste for the chromolithograph on the parlor wall. Marketplace tastes had been shifting slowly over the years, but by the turn of the century, an explosive revolution in the visual arts that included the advent of home photography and the motion picture, changed public tastes quickly and irretrievably. Kurz had managed to outlive the genre he helped to create.

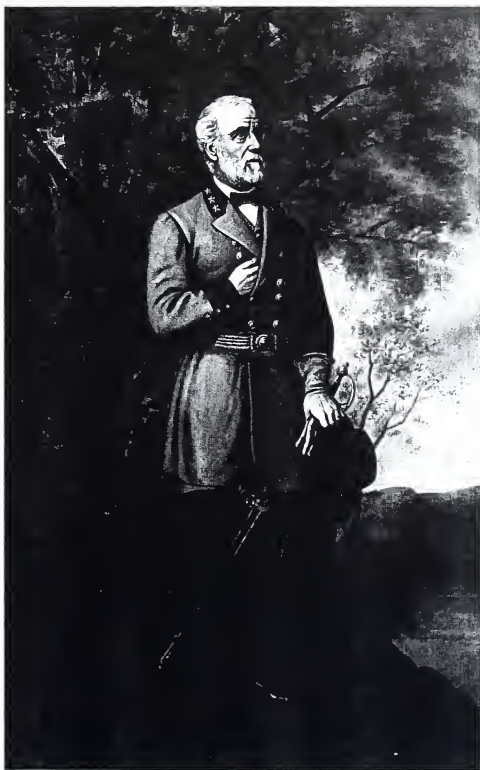
Harry Twyford Peters called Kurz' heyday one of "pure, wild, unadulterated American lithography," and Kurz exemplified that spirit by personifying unabashed artistic commercialism. To understand what he contributed one must understand the age in which he worked.

The viewpoint by which the Kurz archive must be judged was exemplified in his Johnstown Flood piece—one of his final efforts. Here, Kurz offered vivid evidence of his unique artistic sensibilities by including a depiction of a woman, still in her nightgown, mounting a barebacked horse to flee the raging waters. Even in this scene of utter panic, Kurz remembered his sense of order and propriety. The woman was portrayed riding sidesaddle.

Louis Kurz' efforts—his disaster scenes and his Civil War scenes alike—may not provide unassailable documentary evidence of the events they portray. But they do offer invaluable archival evidence of the perspective through which the nation saw itself a century ago.

It was through this uniquely traditional perspective that America took its first and one of its most famous retrospective looks at the Civil War—through the eyes of Louis Kurz. ■





General Robert E. Lee  
*Commander in Chief, Confederate Army*  
 ATLANTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
 3101 Andrews Drive  
 Atlanta, Georgia 30305

This painting by Louis Kurz once hung in the Old Confederate Soldiers' Home and is now a part of the permanent collection of The Atlanta Historical Society.





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